

*In Erin Vickerman's profile essay, she explores the world of Amtgard. She not only interviews one of the members, she also participates in one of their games. How does her involvement with Amtgard increase her credibility as an author (her ethos)? After reading the essay, does your understanding of Amtgard and its members change? Throughout her essay, Vickerman comments about the acceptance felt between Amtgard members; for example, she writes, "Because of Amtgard, Cronin has made many new friends who don't judge him as a nerd like his peers at school tend to." However, in her conclusion, she narrates a scene in which friends who are watching her play laugh at her. How does her language in this section show her audience how she feels—is anything unexpected revealed?*

## Amtgard

Erin Vickerman

I stand behind the thin, white rope carefully placed in a rectangular shape on the lush, green grass. As I glare at the enemy standing across the field, I remind myself, a shot to the torso, dead, the amputation of two limbs, dead. Don't touch the ball. I have a three-foot grey, foam sword clenched in my right hand and a bulky, black shield covering the left side of my body. As I look to my left there are three large men standing in homemade wool robes with black, plastic guards protecting their legs; they have clenched jaws, their knees are bent, and they are ready to charge at any moment. I look back down at my worn brown leather cowboy boots, jean shorts and flowing yellow tank top; I feel exposed. The whistle is blown and everyone charges towards the red rubber ball placed in the center of the field. Being a newbie, I jog slightly behind Griffin, a member of the Seven Sleeping Dragons, who whacks the ball with his sword. The ball slams into his opponent's leg. His enemy is now dead. The battle has begun.

Michael Bosio looks like your somewhat geeky college student. He awkwardly stands lanky and tall, with a short brown buzz cut, almond eyes, and a slightly crooked nose. He takes classes at Cuesta College, and works a part-time job downtown. On Saturday afternoons, around 1:00 pm, Michael takes on a new persona; he is Cronin, Baron of the Seven Sleeping Dragons, a small sector of the Dragonspine Kingdom in a game called Amtgard. Amtgard is a Medieval-based combat system that focuses on battle. The game was established in El Paso, TX by James H. Harren II in 1983, and it quickly spread all over the United States thereafter (AmtWiki). Cronin has been an active member of Amtgard for over 2 years; he said, "I heard about Amtgard at a LAN (local area network) party. I know it all sounds a bit nerdy but I've met a lot of interesting people and immediately found a new enjoyable hobby." In the "world of Amtgard," social class has no importance; the entire purpose of the mock combat is based on striving to do your personal best and to find pleasure in fighting. Because of Amtgard, Cronin has made many new friends who don't judge him as a nerd as his peers at school tend to.

We live in a materialistic society where many of us learn from a very young age that success is growing up, going to college, and getting a high paying job in order to fulfill our duties as adults. Our jobs, homes, cars, even cell phones define our social class and the types of people we relate ourselves to. Peer pressure from age 5 to 45 defines the activities we pursue in our

free time. Watching a 37 year-old grown man fighting whacking a 14-year-old boy with a foam sword in Santa Rosa Park on a Saturday doesn't really fit society's social standards. But does it matter? Should grown men and women care about how others judge what they do in their free time, or should they just forget about the social norm and do something they enjoy? Until I personally tried Amtgard, I thought it was ridiculous that adults were dressing up in robes and pretending to fight.

When I would drive by Santa Rosa Park and watch these people playing dress up and pretending to kill one another in public I had a preconceived notion that they had to hide behind a fantasy because their own lives were so pathetic like the people in the movie *Role Models*. I immediately judged Amtgardians as being childish and nerdy. I thought fake sword fighting in a made up world was something that people should grow out of by the time they turned 12. But after speaking with these people and testing out the game myself, I learned that Amtgard is nothing like L.A.R.P. (Live Action Role Playing) is in the movie. Amtgard is solely based on Medieval-style fighting, whereas L.A.R.P. is based all on people in fake countries fighting to be crowned king; social class is so important that everyone must speak in Medieval English and bow to the King when he walks by. L.A.R.P. is even more of a social hierarchy than our own cruel world; the only difference is that everyone strives to become the "geekiest of the geeks" instead of models, singers or actors. Amtgard isn't an escape from reality, it is just a hobby. It's an activity where people can enjoy themselves and the company of others. Being cool, rich, and smart doesn't matter. The players' only goal is to whack the rubber ball as far as possible before they get killed by their challengers.

A game they play in Amtgard is actually very simple. Two teams of about six to eight people each are divided based on the types of weapons each player is carrying. A player can hold a sword, a dagger, a shield, or a pole arm. Each team then goes to either end of the field, the boundaries shown with rope. A rubber ball is placed in the center of the field. The goal is to get the ball past your opponent's end of the field. Only the weapons can touch the ball otherwise you die. You can also die if a weapon cuts off two different limbs, or hit your torso. It is very fast paced, but also amusing. Anyone, including myself, can easily spend hours playing without getting bored.

Cronin stated "I may not be cool. I enjoy sword fighting, and playing World of Warcraft, but I have fun; the people I play Amtgard with do too and that's really what it is all about. People my age like to get drunk and go to parties, I like to sword fight . . ." It isn't quite the most popular activity for people their age, but they do it because they find enjoyment out of it all. Amtgard is nothing more than a hobby.

I stand face to face with a college age student; he is hunched low to the ground, his small white shield covering his left shoulder, and his red foam dagger is ready to make swift motions at any second. I look at my feet for a moment, realizing the white rope is lying no more than three inches from my right boot; I can't step out of bounds. I look up and strike his left leg with my sword, he falls to the ground. I cut off his leg! Out of excitement I lose concentration and he strikes my left arm, once hidden behind a shield. I throw the shield out of bounds, and I place my arm behind my back. A car full of college age boys drives by with B.o.B blasting from their speakers, they shout "LARP!!!" out the window, but it doesn't faze me. The adrenaline is pumping through my body; nothing can stop me from killing my opponent. As he attempts to thrust towards my legs I strike him in the back of the shoulder. I killed someone! I lift up my hands in pure joy! I look over at my friends Rachel and Jacy watching me from Rachel's bright

yellow jeep parked in the parking lot. They sit in the car laughing hysterically as a 14-year-old boy hits me in the stomach with his sword. I die.

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#### **WORK CITED**

“Amtgard.” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Web 2010. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amtgard>>.